

Theology vol 59

ARGUMENT

FOR

Natural and Revealed Religion :

IN WHICH

The Principles of Freethinkers are examined,

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Ὡρατε καὶ προσεχετε ἀπὸ τῆς ζύμης τῶν Φαρισαίων
καὶ Σαδδουκαίων. *Math.*

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INTRODUCTION.

BEING naturally led to consider the universal consent of mankind, as the surest criterion of truth, it must be acknowledged that the *dogmas* of philosophers, as they are remarkable chiefly for their singularity, come to us in a very suspicious form; and we might be apt to think that the prosecution of any subject upon such principles, instead of producing conviction, can terminate in nothing but the disgrace of the undertaker. And yet such a despotism has been erected upon them, that we have been obliged to beg hard for the preservation of the best principles of our nature, such as the love of our country, natural affection, and all the finest and tenderest feelings of the heart, which have been discarded under the odious name of prejudices: and when we have ventured to expostulate with these *spiritual tyrants*, and tell them that in endeavouring to extirpate harmless prejudices they do much mischief, for that in many instances even these ought to be carefully cherished, as being the means appointed by providence to connect those together who may be incapable of acting upon juster or more rational motives, it has been without effect.

They

They are indeed like the unjust judge, in some respects, seeing they neither fear God nor regard man ; but our constant importunity has had no other consequence than to sooth their vanity, and, as the world believe that they are dangerous men, to determine them to do all the mischief in their power.

In the following pages I have given hints which if prosecuted must convince every one, that the odious name of prejudices will fit the conceits of freethinkers much better, than those principles which by operating universally and consistently in all ages and in all circumstances, prove that they come from God.

CHAP. I.

MAN is brought into the world in a very helpless condition compared with the other animals, and yet by being endued with a rational and immortal soul, he possesseth faculties, which enable him to aspire to heaven, while they are left grovelling upon this earth: and that these faculties, may have their full exertion, we find that whatever can be effected by natural means is always left to be brought about in a natural manner; for, if we may use the expression, the Supreme Being seems to be as it were sparing in the introduction of supernatural agents, and has rather chosen to leave mankind to the full exercise of their own abilities, which have been able to accomplish more than could have been imagined.

A proceeding, different from the ordinary dispensations of his providence, must have been attended with a great inconvenience in another respect, as it would of necessity have a tendency to destroy our confidence in experience, the only sure ground to go upon when left to ourselves: for, if the same causes did not constantly produce the same effects, experience would rather bewilder than guide us.

This stability observable in the laws by which God governs the world, added to our necessities, engaged men to pay attention to natural appearances, reducing them to classes, and thus laying the first foundations of philosophy.

We are connected with the inanimate parts of the creation by our bodies, which in many respects are subject to the same laws, and we apply the several senses as the most obvious means of acquiring knowledge; and to make us sensible that they are but instruments for the mind to employ as occasion requires, the Supreme Being has given us a power of discovering their imperfections; for by furnishing us with a variety of them, the mind is enabled to sit like a judge in determining a controversy, and cross examines them till they are made to produce a rational and consistent testimony. But this is not all; when the soul finds a want of evidence, it can as it were leave the body, and from the models which God has given us, we have been enabled to invent new senses, to correct the imperfection of those bestowed upon us originally, and likewise to extend our views and enjoyments far beyond the sphere seemingly allotted us, upon the nicest survey of our bodily organs.

This is a convincing proof that the soul is totally distinct from the body, which it uses only as an instrument, and this is an essential distinction between us and the beasts, who have certainly no such faculty, and cannot make use of their bodies in the same manner, but exist entirely in their senses, having their thoughts, if we may call them so, confined entirely to the present sensation: but we can in some measure lay aside our senses like an instrument when we have no longer occasion to use it.

From the moment we lay any stress upon experience, we act upon a supposition that the laws of nature are unalterable. But the man who proved that a stone rests upon the surface of the earth, and the moon moves round it by the same law; and likewise that the ebbing and flowing of the sea, and the motion of the planets round the sun, were all reducible

cible to the same principle, was a real ornament to human nature, such conclusions being far removed from vulgar apprehension. These discoveries shew us in a more especial manner, that the universe is governed by fixed laws, and create in us a firm belief, that we are not under the government of a capricious being.

The material and immaterial, the rational and irrational parts of the creation are governed by fixed laws; but man alone has the faculty of improving by experience, and collecting general rules from particular instances, and consequently is the only being upon this earth capable of profiting by such a dispensation; for to the beasts fixed or unfixed laws as such, could make no material alteration; but to man who has the faculty of improving by experience, and of collecting general rules from particular instances, such laws are absolutely necessary. An attentive observation of them leads him directly to their author, whom he discovers to be infinitely wise and powerful, and that if possible, particularly with regard to himself, his goodness exceeds his other attributes. We acquire a confidence in this being, upon the strongest reason, that of an uniform experience, and are persuaded that he will continue to govern the universe by the same laws; and in this confidence we venture to apply them to our conveniencies, and make use of his laws to fence against the necessities of nature; and the feeling from which this confidence springs, I call a sense of natural liberty which cannot exist without an idea of God. Fools may wrangle about liberty as long as they please, but as soon as I arrive at the belief of a Deity, I feel myself free, and instead of depending upon every accident, become sensible of my dependence, upon one being alone, of whose infinite goodness and power and wisdom I am so fully persuaded, that I rest in the greatest security, and this is the highest idea of liberty

I can form. We have a certain sphere allotted to us, within which there is the greatest liberty, and a certain talent assigned us which we are free to improve or lay up in a napkin.

The universal agreement of all nations, in the belief of a God, shews that in every country the same sensations have produced the same conviction, and have led to the same conclusion, which is the strongest confirmation of this doctrine, and is what our belief seems to rest upon in almost every case. Even the having unworthy notions of God is no objection to this universality: thus when I observe the effects of the laws of England, by that circumstance alone, I may be led to form an idea of the legislature, perhaps an imperfect or absurd one, and yet I may have a firm belief in its existence. Nor is it certain that the ideas of nations, concerning this great truth, have been so absurd as we are apt to imagine; for whoever observes the absurdities which may be found, even in attempts to express very common conceptions by figurative language, will not be surprized to find many absurdities, when we try to convey to others an idea that is really incomprehensible.

C H A P. II.

THUS far I have endeavoured to trace, from their proper source, those notions concerning the Deity, which naturally follow from that use of our faculties, which our circumstances in this world in an especial manner require. But in doing this it seemed unnecessary to descend to particulars, as a survey of the discoveries in natural philosophy, and the different contrivances for the ease and convenience of man, will sufficiently answer the purpose.

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But every one who intends to acquire proper notions of the dignity of human nature, or even wishes to be perfectly acquainted with the rank he holds in the creation, ought to set his mind to work upon such subjects, and confine himself to that sphere of inquiry where we are furnished with proper instruments for the acquisition of knowledge; whenever we stray beyond these limits we never fail to produce mortifying proofs of our weakness; for in proportion as we neglect the improvement of our faculties, and overlook the advantages we possess, the mind being naturally active, we engage in frivolous pursuits, and make attempts after an imaginary knowledge, which having no real foundation, leads naturally to this conclusion, that we are upon a level with the beasts that perish, and that like them we cannot safely venture beyond our immediate sensations, and that we ought to make the gratification of them the chief objects of our pursuit, and consider this as the great end of our being.

This is a comfortless situation indeed, very different from that security and serenity which a firm belief in God inspires; and may very well justify the zeal of infidels in their endeavours to procure converts to their opinions, as nothing, except being in a croud, can possibly keep the mind from despair, in the midst of that blackness of darkness into which they have plunged themselves.

The whole plan of our education tho' perhaps the properest that could be thought of, has a strong tendency to pervert our understanding, when we come to form a judgment concerning the evidence produced to prove a matter of fact. Even demonstration, tho' the pride and glory of the mathematician, has nevertheless proved an ignis fatuus to the philosopher, and (strange to tell) a great enemy to truth, and a strong obstacle to rational conviction.

No person can be at a loss to determine, whether he would trust his property in the hands of a judge, who paid no regard to testimony, but made up opinions, all the parts of which were consistent, and which he was pleased to call demonstrations; and not rather in his, who gave the strictest attention to the testimonies produced, and tho' he might be sorry to find them contradictory, yet not so far, as to make him despair of discovering the truth, by proposing his interrogatories in such a judicious manner, that by cross-examining the witnesses, he might be justified in setting some of them aside, and in considering the remainder as consistent.

The children of this world are wise in their generation; we know better than to suffer ourselves to be deluded out of our property, by those arts which philosophers have employed so successfully to impose upon us in matters of much greater importance.

We find it easier to form a consistent theory out of our own imaginations, than to be at the trouble to attend to experience, and reconcile contradictory appearances. We are apt to think that the mind has in itself a power of doing every thing, even without making use of the proper instruments; and this Bacon mentions as the cause of all our errors in science. *Causa vero & radix (says he) fere omnium malorum in scientiis ea una est, quod dum mentis humanæ vires falso miramur & extollimus, vera ejus auxilia non quæramus.* Let us examine particularly the progress of the mind in carrying on this delusion. If we set out with consistent principles and deduce conclusions fairly from them, we shall form a system, the whole of which may be considered as true. But it is carefully to be observed that all these reasonings, allowing them to be the fairest possible, are merely hypothetical, and the most that can be said for the conclusions is that they

they are certain such principles being taken for granted. Nor are we restricted in forming our principles, be they never so far out of the way of common experience and common conception, any farther than this, that they be simple and consistent with each other. Such a latitude furnishes ample scope for multiplying systems; at the same time that the mind finds sufficient employment for its acuteness in examining the principles, to see that none of them be inconsistent with another, and in tracing the connection between the principles and the conclusions deduced from them; this employment indeed so totally engages our thoughts, as to draw away our attention from a very material defect, namely, that this fine building has its foundation in the sand.

What has been just observed may serve, in some measure, to account for the variety of philosophical systems which are to be met with in the world, the many schemes of government, and that multiplicity of religious opinions which have distracted the minds of men; the finest of which, if properly examined, will be found to be creatures of the imagination, and that before any attempts should be made to put them in practice, there ought to be a new world and new inhabitants shaped and formed for every particular system.

Those who begin their enquiries with definitions, not only take *them* for granted but all their consequences, and yet very modestly produce these reveries as rules of conduct and judgment, even when they have a tendency to overturn every thing sacred and respectable among men, and by way of excuse tell you, that they only follow truth and are determined to go wherever it may lead them. Thus he who mistakes an ignis fatuus for a fixed light proceeding from some house, and travels on upon this supposition, reasons
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very fairly, and yet after the loss of a great many lives, an honest man could not be blamed for warning the country around of their danger.

Whoever makes the discovery of facts the object of his inquiry, ought to take care never to set out with definitions, for things really existing can never be accurately defined, because a true definition includes all the properties of the thing defined. Thus the definition of a Circle includes all its properties, nor is any thing allowed to be a property of a Circle, but what may be shewn to follow from the definition, and every consequence which may be fairly deduced from it, however remote from common apprehension, must be esteemed as such. But if we claim such an absolute dominion over facts, we put ourselves in the place of God; for when we take the liberty of forming definitions at pleasure, the properties are created and owe their very existence to this formation: the mind in such contemplations as these, never looks for real existences but only consistent and possible conclusions. Here the philosopher, as he is employed upon objects of his own creating, reigns absolute, and performs such wonders as no romance can equal. His truths are only confined to possibilities, and his conclusions are, Which is not inconsistent with my principles, which is absurd according to my principles, or contradicts them.

Were we not connected with the present system of things, which obliges us to pay attention to experience, how pleasant and smooth might our days pass. Then every club might be taken measure of, for a suit of opinions as for a suit of cloaths, and the several — might fit their customers to a hair, without the mortification of being stared at for their singularity, or the danger of unavoidable ruin by acting upon their own principles. For those who put their trust in such system builders, have one very considerable advantage, because

because if they will but shut their eyes to what passes in the world, they are more likely to agree among themselves, than those who collect their opinions from experience, and are obliged to take up with them clouded with all the difficulty which constantly attends matter-of-fact evidence. Seeing the conclusions deduced from principles taken for granted are sufficient for gaining assent, as Bacon justly observes, *Anticipationes satis firmæ sunt ad consensum, quandoquidem, si homines etiam insanirent ad unum modum & conformiter, illi satis bene inter se congruere possint.*

The mind employed in the regions of possibilities conceives it's powers to be very great, and thinks it can do every thing; but when confined to the investigation of the properties of things really existing, experiment and observation make us sensible that all these fine speculations are but airy visions and deluding dreams.

If these things are so absurd as I pretend, it may seem difficult to account for the reception they meet with in the world. To pass by a great many reasons which may be given, I shall only insist on the prejudice of education, which to me seems in a great measure to account for it.

We ought carefully to observe, that demonstration is not concerned about facts or truth, its object is nothing but consistency: it is an instrument contrived to remedy a defect, which would soon be found among mankind, namely, a confusion arising from a multiplicity of perceptions and not for the discovery of truth. When we acquire our knowledge immediately by the senses, the opinions of mankind are found in the greatest harmony; but upon the invention of such a complicated arbitrary instrument as language, the variety of conclusions they were led into, made them

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begin to doubt whether there might not be a difference in the very perceptions of men. This gave rise to the various methods of instruction, for fixing the attention upon the same subject, and that the thoughts of different people might follow each other in the same order. But the habits acquired in going through this piece of discipline have a wonderful effect upon the mind, which shews itself very visibly when men first come into the world, for they find they must enlarge their notions, and draw conviction from a variety of sources, very different from what they had been accustomed to.

Thus the labours of many ingenious men tho' useful to society, have a strong tendency to pervert our understanding, and this happens when they treat of things that are not only useful, but appear very innocent: for, with regard to arbitrary things, you may mould them into whatever shape you please, and make their parts consistent, and give them excellencies according to imaginary standards of taste. Thus, for instance, in grammar, we may form a regular system, and we are bunglers if all the parts are not consistent. A sentence is proposed to be examined by certain rules, we find it bears the test required, we are charmed with the discovery; we call the operation of the mind when thus employed, reasoning; and this discovery, truth: by frequent exercise upon things of the same kind, this notion becomes so fixed, that hardly any time or experience is sufficient to eradicate it entirely; nor can we entirely get the better of this prejudice until we have acquired the discernment to perceive, that things really fixed cannot be made to assume any shape we please, but must be tried by other rules not less certain though less familiar. In short, the whole course of our education in our younger years may be considered as preparing the mind for such systems. And even when we come to the study of philosophy, the

the true and false resemble each other in so many circumstances, that it is not easy for a superficial person to undeceive himself. The method of argumentation is the same in both. True philosophy is employed about real existences and their properties; false philosophy about the properties of imaginary ones. The argumentative part may be the same in both, only the principles in the one are taken for granted, while those of the other are proved from experiment. The conclusions from the hypothetical principles may be true, that is, possible truths, the error is in putting them upon us for facts. The true philosopher, (I understand by this term one who applies himself to explain the appearances of nature) after examining the appearances, and settling his principles upon experience, though he deduce his conclusions according to the strictest rules of reasoning, yet he never esteems them for truths, if they contradict appearances, and is hardly satisfied until appearances are found to confirm them. But this is a proceeding of great pains and labour, and very little calculated for the general disposition of mankind, who are commonly found to have a strong inclination to procure things in the easiest way, unless driven to a different practice by very particular circumstances. This lazy humour is wonderfully gratified by having a system ready made, which in a very simple manner shall solve all difficulties, without going that round-about way to work which nature prescribes. Hence the race of philosophers, and hence the philosophic systems which abound so much in the world, and which enter so much into all serious instruction, whether acquired from books or schools, which so corrupt our minds that it is with the greatest difficulty we can see the truth even in the plainest cases. Our judgments being formed upon these plausible systems, and a fallacious kind of reasoning which enters into almost every part of our education, we are made to look for a kind of evidence

which the nature of things will not admit of. Habit has a remarkable influence upon our thoughts and reasonings; and this proves a fruitful source of error among speculative men, when presuming upon our skill in one science, we are so rash as to give judgment upon other subjects of which we may be totally ignorant. We ought to be cautious in doing this for fear of exposing our weakness; but more especially ought we to be so, when the things are of importance. A mathematician, for instance, has his mind so constantly employed about the properties of extension, that he can hardly allow himself to think any thing else has properties; and must be perpetually endeavouring to reduce the opinions of other men to the same length, and breadth and height with his own. Hence the fools as they are called in the language of God, but free-thinkers among mortals, continue as formerly, with such success to scatter firebrands, arrows and death, and say, Are we not in sport?

C H A P. III.

WHOEVER is desirous of fixing his opinions upon a firm foundation, must deduce his knowledge of mankind from his own experience and from history, and altho' after such an enquiry he may find man reducible to no philosophic system, but too various to be accurately described, yet enough will be found to enable us to judge with great accuracy, what can be performed by man in a natural state, sufficient to distinguish him from the beasts on the one hand, and from those who have had supernatural assistance on the other. This view of the subject will serve admirably to shew the dignity of human nature, at the same time that it will discover to us such a load of imperfections, as must appear almost intolerable, while,

while little or no provision was made for many of the most important desires of the human soul.

It is a known fact, that men possess different kinds of abilities, and these in different degrees, whether arising from the particular circumstances in which they are placed, or occasioned by an essential difference in the human mind. Hence the strong endeavour to keep the weak in subjection, the subtil to over-reach the simple, and the wise to govern the foolish. In this struggle, the generality of mankind shelter themselves under different leaders, according to their inclinations or their fears. In which state the faculties of the many are so benumbed either by oppression or want of exercise, that in some measure we partake of the nature of vegetables, and if suffered to remain long on the same spot, without instruction, or circumstances to call forth an exertion of our faculties, we never could entertain the most distant notions of shaking off our dependence, but become fixed to the soil like trees in a forest. We acquire a kind of veneration for our Lord, and look upon ourselves and our posterity happy in being his slaves, and lose so totally all notions of the rights of human nature, that we not only bear oppression patiently ourselves, but become the infatuated instruments for oppressing others. It is impossible with such dispositions and in such circumstances, for the generality of mankind ever to vindicate their liberty, and lay claim to their natural rank in the creation: especially if we add to this, that we come from the hands of our Creator with a strong sense of our weakness, which makes us fly to society for protection; and with a load of imperfections and miseries, for which nothing but a future state offers any thing like an adequate remedy. These create in us appetites equally craving as the calls of hunger and thirst. Hence we find that in every situation, mankind must have some religion and some government;
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and however absurd the one or tyrannical the other, they are submitted to and received for want of better.

Is it to be supposed in such a state and disposition of things, that the rich and powerful would be disposed to consider the meaner sort as brethren, or to look upon them in any other light, than merely as instruments for promoting their different pursuits?

Suppose, therefore, that our Saviour had been only a mere man, who had the wisdom to contrive, and the courage to set about overturning this kingdom of darkness, and in opposition, to a stock of pride and prejudices, which had been four thousand years in collecting, to declare publicly to the world that we are all brethren, and equal in every essential circumstance; and moreover, by his fortitude in maintaining this doctrine, to inspire his followers with such a spirit as enabled them, at the hazard of their lives, to spread those glad tidings thro' the whole world; where, even upon free-thinking principles, shall we find so proper an object of adoration?

But let us attend to this dispensation not with hearts contracted and hardened by systems and the prejudices of this world, but softened by the feelings of humanity, and with minds prepared for that comprehensive view which nature exhibits; and we shall find the same Beneficent Being, who has so fully supplied our natural wants, with a more than fatherly care, supplying those which the mind finds in itself, and providing the means of gratification for every rational desire.

For while the principles which we may call natural ones, were taking their course, a scheme of quite a different sort, and from the remotest antiquity was carrying

carrying on, the Deity immediately interposing in all transactions, producing effects not according to his usual dispensations, nor according to those fixed laws by which he governs the universe: foretelling future events, not to gratify the inquisitive humour of particular persons, but to form a chain of connected prophecies, all fitly adapted to a certain scheme, as parts to a whole. Who that attends to these proceedings, can help crying out, Marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty!

These dispensations of Providence are so wonderful, one might imagine, as to engage men to admire them, were we no farther concerned than to regard them merely as a subject of speculation. But when it is positively asserted, that our eternal happiness or misery depends upon our forming proper notions concerning them, our inattention surely then must be considered as wholly without excuse: especially when we observe that imagination cannot conceive stronger evidence than we have been favoured with, in proof of the truth of our religion. And indeed, nothing less than madness, could account for our indifference; if we did not take into consideration the corruptions of philosophy, and that the whole course of our education, fills us with such prejudices that we leave the fountain of living waters, and are perpetually hewing out to ourselves broken cisterns that can hold no water.

That the evidence is as strong as I pretend, may be collected from an attentive perusal of the scriptures: and a comparison of them with the facts recorded in profane history, will prove beyond a doubt, the supernatural interposition of the Supreme Being. The facts are coeval with the world, which very circumstance ought to have great weight, and the history which records them is undoubtedly of great antiquity,
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at least as antient as any profane history whatsoever, and as well authenticated. Whoever imagines that an imposition could be carried on thro' such a succession of ages, without the least discovery being made, must have strange notions of mankind, and what history is far from countenancing. Let a person who has got over the prejudices of education, consider the character of our saviour, his miracles, with all the circumstances of his life and death; and then take a view of the things recorded in the Old Testament, he will soon be convinced of the full completion of the prophecies, and that to this remarkable period, all its forms and ceremonies, have an immediate relation.

Our saviour makes such strong appeals to his miracles, as a proof of his divine commission, that they require our most serious attention: and whoever considers them impartially, will find no reason to imagine that their evidence is in any degree weakened by the resemblance they may seem to bear to the impositions of the church of Rome, or other pretended miracles. We know the villany of mankind to be so great, that a sufficient number may be got to join in any fraud, provided there be but the least possibility of success; and it was very natural in this case, to make our Saviour's miracles the models after which they were to frame their impositions. But our powers of deceiving are more limited than our inclinations; and generally the means we use to prevent detection, give a sufficient handle even to an ordinary critical sagacity, for discovering the imposition. It would indeed be something to the purpose, if before our Saviour's time, they could prove that people had been imposed upon by pretended miracles, exactly of the same kind with those contained in the gospel, performed in the same public manner, and attended with the same circumstances.

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The Bible contains the history of a people, the singularity of whose government and religion prove that they came immediately from God. In this history we see a nation, not as usual deriving their origin from the gods, and instead of ascribing to themselves virtues which they did not possess, telling the naked truth, in things which obviously tend to their dishonour. Surely every unprejudiced person, even upon this view of the subject, will be ready to conclude, that this history was dictated by a spirit very different from that which commonly prevails among mankind. At the same time this history is unquestionably of the remotest antiquity; and the people are constantly described, as in an unnatural situation, and under such constant restraint, as human nature never could put itself. No wonder that they frequently rebelled, when they were made, if I may so express myself, to act not from sufficient motives, or upon such principles as according to the common course of nature, ought to gratify themselves, but merely to be as it were the shadows of things to come. No views of aggrandizing their posterity, nor of acting according to those principles which all history and every one's experience confirm to be the prevailing principles in the human breast. Not only natural affection and the desire of aggrandizing their posterity, but even pity seems upon so many occasions to have forsaken them, that they have not the least appearance of being left to their own sensations, but under the immediate influence of a superior power, using them only as instruments for carrying on his wonderful purposes. Undoubtedly it required the constant interposition of God to keep a people in such circumstances, by any means to their duty.

That we might be imposed upon in a few single detached facts, may be easily granted; and that a few extraordinary appearances would be no good grounds

grounds for believing that there was any extraordinary interposition of providence; but surely a series of extraordinary appearances carried on in succession from the earliest ages, all tending to the same purpose, is such a foundation for belief as no man can lay: and must produce a full conviction in every unprejudiced mind, that the Bible is, what it professes to be, a revelation from God.

Our Saviour has hinted to us, that we have the same evidence for revelation, which we find in subjects of natural philosophy. This I infer from his address to the Jews, where he tells them they could discern the face of the sky, but did not perceive that the prophecies were fulfilling in him. This led me to an examination of the subject, in order to satisfy myself if this were true; and from a great variety of instances, sufficient to satisfy any one who is a judge of the subject, it appears that the evidence is the same in both systems, and attended with the same difficulties. I was fully satisfied in the course of this examination, that it is only our own conceits which admit of what we call demonstration; and that the difficulties to be found both in revelation and natural philosophy, are a proof that they come from God; for it is the prerogative of his works to be unsearchable: whereas in human contrivances, any beauty they have, strikes us at first sight, and a particular examination never fails to cure us of our admiration. But his goodness, in both cases, is abundantly shewn in this, that we may certainly know as much of either, as is necessary for our purpose. We may take a large and comprehensive view of both systems, but whenever we descend to minuteness in either, we never fail to bewilder ourselves. Thus when we consider the great system of the universe, the laws of motion are very clear and intelligible, serving admirably to manifest the power and wisdom of God. But it would be in vain to attempt even to compute
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the forces by which the particles of matter act upon each other, in the solution of metals and other chymical processes, much more to try to reduce them to what are called general laws of motion. These can only be recorded as facts, not reducible to any system. In the same manner, we may have from the Bible, a very clear and comprehensive view of the scheme of Providence for the redemption of mankind, tho' we may perplex ourselves in attempting to explain particular passages, so as to make them fall in with our general view of the subject.

The most obvious conclusion from what I have just now mentioned is, that a man who sets about examining the doctrines of scripture, ought to consider the Bible in the same light, as a natural philosopher does the appearances of nature; and as Newton, in his rules of philosophizing, declares against every thing which may be advanced against his conclusions from experience, from hypotheses, in the same manner the divine, should declare against any thing which may be advanced from preconceived notions of the Deity, and his manner of dealing with mankind, whenever it contradicts consequences fairly deduced from scripture. The doctrine of the Trinity therefore, and the other mysteries of our holy religion, are not to be examined by vain human conceits, but are to be collected from passages of scripture, explained and compared according to the rules of sound criticism. And as in natural philosophy, tho' the appearances are open to every one, yet it is only those who have applied themselves to the learning necessary for such investigations, who can be supposed capable of judging concerning the decision of any philosophical question; so in divinity, it is only those who have applied themselves to the learning necessary for that purpose, who can be supposed capable of determining upon any point, whether it be the doctrine of scripture. But the absurdity of every

one's supposing himself a judge in religious matters, because religion was intended for the benefit of all, and the appeals necessarily made to the people, upon the reformation of religion, has introduced such a medley of absurd and ridiculous opinions, as made it absolutely necessary to compose creeds and articles of faith, both for the peace of civil society, and to preserve true and orthodox notions. The generality of mankind were intended neither for divines nor philosophers, tho' divinity and philosophy may be made beneficial to every one. What we are to believe concerning God, and what duty he requires of us, may be explained to the meanest capacity; as the lowest mechanic may be taught to apply the rules of philosophy to practice.

Let us therefore lay aside our prejudices, and carry our minds beyond those little contracted systems, by which they have been fettered; and learn, from a comparison of the Bible with profane history, the goodness of God in affording us such a clear proof of his supernatural interposition, by separating the Jews from the other nations; by which we not only discover his wonderful dealings with mankind in the redemption of the world, but also his remarkable condescension in treating us so much like rational creatures, by affording us such a wonderful chain of evidence, reaching from the very creation of the world, to this day. Which is analogous to his proceedings in the natural world, where he has given us the brutes, with even quicker sensations than ours, totally without any of those faculties, by which we certainly perceive, that strictly speaking, the body can hardly be considered as a part of us; but only an instrument which when we lay aside, God will furnish us with another, better fitted for the condition in which it may please him to place us.

C H A P. IV.

THE same providence which hath ordained a greater abundance of iron than of gold, has formed more men qualified for action than speculation; and as all nations advance regularly from rudeness to civilization, we find in the bulk of mankind a strong disposition to improvement and reformation; which are circumstances that seem peculiarly fitted for overcoming such difficulties as are to be met with in a solitary and rude state; and such principles as spring from them ought to be encouraged in the infancy of a society, and suffered to exert themselves without controul, though they require to be checked when once it has made considerable progress.

For it appears from history, that, whenever the necessities of mankind have demanded any great exertion abilities for the attainment of a particular purpose, provided circumstances have rendered the prosecution of the plan seasonable, by a gradual preparation of the people for it, the same persons who set about the work have generally been so successful in their endeavours as to bring it in a great measure to perfection; or if any thing remained to be done, it rather regarded elegance than use, which could not be expected from the clumsy hand of every schemer.

This has created very great trouble to politicians, who have found themselves very much at a loss to furnish employment for that redundancy, both of inventive and executive genius, which is commonly left in motion after the accomplishment of any great scheme of improvement. For the firm ground being occupied by the first adventurers, they who came after had nothing left but either to build castles in the air,
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or attempt to demolish what had been already built; in both which projects, we have the woeful experience that they have been often but too successful.

This has made it necessary to oppose policy to strength, in order to secure the advantages already gained, which has often made use both of arts and instruments, very little consistent with the rights of humanity.

But of all the attacks which have ever been made upon the privileges of mankind, the proceedings of the church of Rome were both the most cruel and unnatural; for they enslaved both body and soul; and by the strangest perversion of Christianity made the gospel of peace the occasion of discord, and converted its glorious spirit of liberty into an instrument of oppression, and had even the impudence to deprive men of their senses which of course opened a door for every species of imposition.

However, God be thanked, we are now completely freed from this yoke, which deliverance was accomplished upon the principles of the soundest philosophy, but with too much deference to vulgar opinion. It was found necessary at the time of the reformation, in order to give the people proper notions of the impositions of the church of Rome, to translate the Bible into the vulgar tongue, upon the publication of which, appeals were made (I think very injudiciously) to the lowest of the people as judges of the controversy; for I have sometimes been led to consider this proceeding like the sowing of the dragon's teeth, which sprung up into a race of men, who were to be extirpated before the enterprize could be achieved.

It was found a practicable thing, to give the generality of the nation as much learning as might qualify them

them to read the scriptures and profit by them; but by no means to enable them to judge of controversies; for there were many things proper to be retained, and others that wanted only to be reformed, of which they could not be proper judges; so that the light indulged them had no other effect, than to shew how much they had been imposed upon, and to give them terrible apprehensions of every thing which came in their way; for they became jealous even of attempts to improve them, and render them happier, because they were set on foot by authority: they listened to every clamour, and became perfectly outrageous; they took measures rather from resentment, than with any view of adopting such a plan, as might be the means of preventing the same evils for the future, and rose so high in their demands as not to be satisfied with what was suitable to their rank in society.

The silliest fellow in the world, when it has once been discovered to him that he has been cheated, shall think highly of himself from that very circumstance, and probably put himself into the hands of a sharper, and then boast that he is out of the reach of imposition: which was exactly the case with our people in the last century.

Our reformers seem to have trusted too much to the goodness of their cause, and forgot that the generality of mankind are so liable to be deluded, that they might seem created for the convenience of quacks of all denominations; and that in religious matters the mob have always been more ready to shew themselves the disciples of Barabas than of Jesus.

But as we have the happiness in this country to be treated as rational creatures, and governed by fixed laws; so likewise during our greatest troubles there were always to be found men of cool heads and warm hearts,

hearts, who run all hazards, even of life itself, for the good of their country : these men being able to foresee, that with prudent management the madness of the people must have an end, thought the best service they could perform, would be to take measures for the constitution both with regard to civil and religious matters, and never to lose sight of their great object, the settling both upon true principles of christian liberty.

Some shallow politicians have taken up a notion, that the church of England is but one of those religious sects into which the nation is divided, and do her the honour to consider her in no other light, than merely as the prevailing one. They might just as well say that the present government is only the prevailing faction compared with the rump-agitators, committee men, &c. and then *the good old cause* instead of being a reproach, ought to be treated with civility like a gentleman in distress, expecting better times, when, if he pleases, he may have an opportunity of returning the civility.

But we trust that both our religion and government have a firmer foundation, as they rest upon fixed rules, which are the essence of liberty ; for the very notion of being subject to the will of a capricious being such as man, is totally inconsistent with it. For upon what grounds could we attempt to make improvement if there were not fixed rules for securing our property : and should these laws appear even severe, yet we might set heartily to work ; because difficulties may be surmounted if we can be certain where they lie ; and, in the civil as well as in the natural world, they may sometimes turn out very different from our expectation ; as the sea, which at first view seems intended to keep nations asunder, has, by the ingenuity of men, been made
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the very means of uniting them. From which I would infer that fixed laws constitute the very spirit of liberty, operating upon all the members of the state according to their circumstances.

It is necessary, no doubt, that these laws be reasonable, and surely it will be allowed reasonable, that every state require its members to be honest; but inconveniences would arise if some rule was not formed by which to judge of this honesty: the law must know that a man is a knave before he can be condemned. In the same manner I conceive, when people were in earnest about a reformation of religion, it could be considered as no great hardship, if every member of the state were required to be a Christian. A rule was as necessary in this case as the other, and such an one as might be liable to no experimented inconveniences; sufficient to guard us against superstition on the one hand and enthusiasm on the other, both equally enemies to society, the one lulling mankind to sleep, and the other rousing them to madness; which may be performed by mean and paltry instruments, as the humming of a nurse will lull to sleep, and the noise of a drum, tho' occasioned by its very emptiness, rouses the spirits.

But our civil and religious liberty could never be made consistent as long as we were under the dominion of Rome, for we are told, by very great authority, that a house divided against itself cannot stand; and as we cannot serve two masters, it was necessary that all authority should proceed from one. This rendered the division of the people into church and state merely nominal; and made the Archbishop of Canterbury and the Lord chief Justice of England equally the servants of the public, every individual of which considered themselves, and were to be considered as honest men and Christians, according to the laws of the

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land ; and desirous to see those who were not, restrained from disturbing the peace of society, by admonition and correction ; yet not in a capricious manner, but according to fixed rules.

Nothing can be more contrary to matter of fact, than to consider the established church as the religion of the magistrate, or of the clergy ; it is the religion of the Bible confirmed to be such by the united wisdom of a nation, at that time the wisest and most philosophical ; the articles of faith being fairly deduced from scripture ; in the same manner as any thing found in philosophy has been inferred from natural appearances ; and the discipline and ceremonies from the purest practice of primitive times.

However, as a great many prejudices were to be removed, and the arts of designing men to be counteracted, that these laws might be the readier received, according to the spirit of our constitution, it was necessary to give a sufficient reason for every change which was made, and likewise to shew that those laws were likely to answer the purposes intended by them. This furnished work for the ingenuity of writers ; and of course when the articles were established, it was reasonable to expect all those inconveniences which are mentioned in the beginning of this chapter : it had the same effect as the invention of an ingenious machine, which throws a number of hands out of employment, and was attended with the same consequences ; nothing but riots, assemblings, combinations against every one who had a hand in the contrivance.

Thus, happily for us, our civil and religious liberties are upon the same foundation ; not depending upon the capricious fancies and humours of men ; but upon fixed and approved rules formed upon the truest philosophical

losophical notions, acquired in the only way which truth seems to be attainable. It would be absurd for Roman catholics to have articles, for where they have an infallible judge to appeal to, it would be ridiculous to suppose any other rule necessary. And whoever is against the having a fixed rule by which we are to determine who is a Christian, acts upon popish principles, which, if left to take their effect, will undoubtedly end in the same consequences.

It is a shame to see a people who value themselves upon their liberty, consisting entirely in being governed by fixed laws, which have for their object the removal of former grievances or the experimental proof of future advantages; it is a shame, I say, to see this people suspect priestcraft in the very laws intended to remove it for ever. Such a people may be compared to a horse, who if he has once been bemired, will start and shun the place, and if urged on, throw his rider in the dirt, even after it has been repaired and rendered quite safe.

T H E E N D.

It is a fault to be a people who value themselves upon their liberty, consisting entirely in being governed by laws, which have for their object the removal of former grievances or the experimental proof of future advantages; it is a fault, I say, to see the people of a country in the very laws intended to remove it for ever. Such a people may be compared to a horse, who if he has once been bled, will lean and lean, and it urged on, throw his rider in the dust, and it has been repeated and repeated.

It is a fault to be a people who value themselves upon their liberty, consisting entirely in being governed by laws, which have for their object the removal of former grievances or the experimental proof of future advantages; it is a fault, I say, to see the people of a country in the very laws intended to remove it for ever. Such a people may be compared to a horse, who if he has once been bled, will lean and lean, and it urged on, throw his rider in the dust, and it has been repeated and repeated.



THE END.

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